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ABSTRACT

This study of student-facilitated study groups at Brooks Community College explores how students structured the study group experience and what type of interaction occurred during the group sessions. The study groups were created for high content introductory courses in which high percentages of students had been unsuccessful. Student leaders were hired to facilitate group activities and help students develop and utilize study strategies for a particular class. Four groups were observed, in the fields of psychology, chemistry, sociology, and history, each with from one to 10 students. Three themes emerged from observation of study groups and interviews with participants: (1) collaboration among students, which included the collective effort of students to direct the study sessions, sharing of materials, sharing of knowledge, and supporting each other through interpersonal interaction; (2) role of the group leader and its influence on student participation; and (3) perceived impact of the study groups, which included study skills, familiarity with course content, comfort level with content, confidence, and out-of-class involvement. The study groups represented a form of student involvement, in which strong patterns of collaboration, academic integration, and even social interaction were evident. The study groups also illustrated patterns of active learning and indicated that the use of authority and knowledge are important to understanding student participation. (Contains 10 references.) (JDD)

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Lessons Learned From Study Groups: Collaboration, Cooperation, and Involvement Among Community College Students

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Cooperative Learning and Pedagogy

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Doubletree Hotel, Tucson, Arizona, November 10-13, 1994. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Introduction

The retention and the development of students have been, and will continue to be, two of the prominent issues in higher education. The individual student's level of involvement in both the institution as a whole and his or her own academic experiences have emerged as important links to student retention and academic/cognitive development (Astin, 1985; Pace, 1982).

In an effort to more fully understand students' experiences, we have looked at these issues in terms of: the level of student involvement; the role of social and academic integration; the exploration of student learning; and the efforts of institutions to involve their students.

While all institutions are charged with the complicated task of helping students become more involved, community colleges are truly challenged. In the context of the community college, the issues are similar, but other factors must be taken into consideration. The opportunities for student involvement are more limited at the community college due to the lower number of formal and informal activities and mechanisms for student involvement.

Traditional opportunities for involvement (e.g., residence halls, social organizations, athletic teams) are less prominent or do not exist at many community colleges. The diversity of the student body, coupled with the fragmented missions and priorities of these institutions, also contributes to lower levels of student involvement on campus.

Ironically, many of the students at community colleges are those who have the most

to gain from greater academic and social involvement on campus. These students are often academically or socially disadvantaged, they are often first-generation students, and their academic and social interaction is often limited to their time in formal classes. Many of the characteristics which define the students of a community college are also related to lower academic persistence and success. For example, community college students often work part or full time and are mostly commuters--two characteristics associated with lower academic persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Considering the role of social and academic involvement in student success, it is clear that exploring the opportunities that do exist on community college campuses may uncover the way in which these students structure and utilize their experiences. Studying the interaction of students at community colleges may lead to more useful definitions and understanding of involvement and integration.

This paper reports on a study of student facilitated study groups at a community college. The purpose of this study was to explore how students structured the study group experience and what type of interaction occurred during the group sessions. The paper discusses the collaboration between students, the role of the group leaders and student participation, and the perceived impact of the study groups. The results of the study shed light on patterns of collaboration and student involvement that evolved and have implications for the understanding and utilization of student involvement concepts and initiatives.

This paper will review the methodology and emerging themes of the study and discuss the implications of these themes on existing ideas of involvement and active

learning. I will conclude by examining the implications for further research and practice.

The Study

In the Fall of 1993 I was working on an assessment project of a remedial program at Brooks Community College (BCC). During this time I became familiar with the study group program that was designed to help students develop study skills and become more successful in high content courses. The groups were intriguing for several reasons--but primarily because the students involved with the group were expected to take on responsibility for the structure and purpose of the meetings. Qualitative methods were used to explore the study group program. The following section describes the setting, methodology, and limitations of the study.

Setting

Brook Community College is a comprehensive community college serving over 8000 students from both urban and rural areas. It is a single campus institution located in the geographic center of the county it serves. It provides academic, vocational, and continuing education programs and courses.

BCC found that many of their students were having difficulty with the high content courses that serve as the basis for the academic programs. For example, students entering the Biology 101 course were having trouble dealing with the intensity and amount of information. Instructors and administrators mentioned that this difficulty was, at least in part, due to the fact that many students had never experienced college level work before

these courses and the students were not prepared to handle the amount of information.

In response to the number of students who were not successful in these high content courses, BCC established the Supplemental Instruction (SI) and Study Cluster (SC) program (SISC). SISC establishes and administrates student lead voluntary study groups for high risk courses. The Supplemental Instruction groups are funded by a grant and the Study Cluster groups are funded by the institution itself. The basic difference between the two types of groups is that SI student leaders attend the corresponding class lecture and are designated for higher risk courses. Because of budget limitations the SC group leaders are not paid to attend lectures. Other than the lecture attendance required of SI leaders, all expectations are the same for the leaders. Two part-time positions were established to administrate the program and advise group leaders. Currently, adjunct instructors hold these positions.

The SISC program identifies high content introductory courses that have had a history of 30% or more students withdrawing or receiving a D or failing grade in the class. The program advisors then meet with the faculty member who teaches these particular course sections to determine the potential usefulness of establishing a study group for that class.

If there is agreement on the potential usefulness of the study group, the faculty member is then asked to suggest students who have taken the class who might be interested in working as a group leader. After the faculty identifies a potential student leader (usually based upon success in course and rapport with instructor and classmates) the student is interviewed by SISC administrators.

Student leaders are hired for one semester and are paid a stipend. They are expected to work six to ten hours a week and their responsibilities include: participating in a week long training program; establishing a time and day for the meeting; facilitating group activities; working with the faculty and SISC advisors to discuss the progress of the group; and keeping a record of group attendance. SI leaders must attend the class lectures, but some SC leaders also attend class to assist their groups. The group leaders use the program advisors and the faculty member as resources to help facilitate the group.

The purpose of the study groups, as stated in the training manuals, is to give students an opportunity to work together with a role model (the student leader) to develop and utilize study strategies for a particular class. Although there may be several sections of a course (e.g., there are several sections of Chemistry 101 in any given semester), the study group is designed for a particular instructor's section or sections. This allows the groups to deal with instructor specific issues as well as course content.

Data Collection

Qualitative methods have been used to understand the study groups. Methods of data collection included: observations of study groups; interviews with students, student leaders, and administrators; and review of program materials such as training manuals and advertisements for study groups.

Observations. During the semester that this study was initiated, there were 16 study groups running. The study groups observed were suggested by the program administrators

based on the related course, the student leader, and session attendance. Four groups were observed over the course of the Fall 1993 semester. These were Psychology, Chemistry, Sociology, and History study groups. Psychology was a SI group lead by Heather, a woman in her mid-thirties who was interested in a nursing career. There was an average attendance of about six-eight students each week in her group. Chemistry was a SI group lead by Charles, a man in his mid-thirties who was in the process of applying to physical therapy programs. On average there were approximately eight to ten students in that group. Sociology was lead by Anne, a woman in her early forties who was pursuing a sociology degree and interested in a four year degree as well (sociology or psychology). There were usually six to eight students at this group. History was lead by Tina, a woman in her early twenties who was finishing her last semester at BCC and was planning on attending a local four year institution for an English degree. There were usually one to three students at the History group meetings.

Each group had varying patterns of attendance (that related to course tests and assignments) and the group leaders described the group membership as being diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, and educational goals (this was also recorded in observations).

The first time I attended each group the group leader would introduce me to the students and tell them that I was interested in learning about study groups. They would also asked the students if I could stay. There was no apparent resistance to my presence at the groups, and I received no negative feedback concerning my presence. During the group sessions, I took notes on the student characteristics, physical positioning of students, interaction between students, and the discussions and activities of the students. I also

collected handouts that were circulated during group meetings.

Interviews. Interviews with the people involved were in the form of informal discussions, as well as more structured conversations. Opportunities to discuss the study sessions occurred before and after sessions and in the administrative office of the program. Interviews were conducted with the two program advisors, related administrators, and student leaders. Over the course of the semester I met and spoke with eight leaders of various groups. Over the course of the semester, I visited the office at least once a week and this gave me the opportunity to meet group leaders and discuss the program on an ongoing basis.

Document Review. Two types of documents were reviewed and analyzed in conjunction with the observations and interviews. The first consisted of training materials and guidelines that were provided by the advisors. These materials are distributed to study group leaders and used as reference materials throughout the course of the semester. The other documents were handouts provided by the group leaders during meetings.

Analysis

Analysis began as soon as data collection began. Developing ideas and themes were examined, refined and challenged as the data collection occurred. Student leaders and program administrators were asked for their feedback on the emerging themes for clarity and further investigation.

Limitations

Although I have been allowed access to the study groups and have had the privilege of talking with group leaders and program advisors, I believe that the study thus far serves as more of an pilot than a complete work.

At this point, the conceptual framework for this research is related to the ideas of student involvement and active learning. To continue to explore the emerging themes and further contribute to the existing discussions on involvement and student success, the observations will be continued and I have started to identify students who have participated in study groups for future interviews.

The SISC program is considering a follow-up study to track the academic success and persistence of students who participate in the study groups. Although that type of information will prove useful, the focus of this study was on the perceived impact of the study groups--not the correlation between the groups and academic success.

There is a great amount of interaction and activity occurring during the study groups, and a certain percentage of that is effectively recorded during data collection. Further observations will increase the coverage of issues and interaction within the groups.

Finally, as with any participant observation, I believe my own values and perspective may impact the collection and organization of data to a degree. Although I have worked consciously to be aware of this during this study, I would point out my own perspective may have impacted my research. For example, my background in higher education may have influenced my attention to the issues of involvement within the group.

The use of informal interviews and the upcoming plans for more structured

interviews should help develop and clarify understanding about the groups. This triangulation of information should address some of the inherent issues of observer bias.

Emerging Themes

There are three major themes developing from this research. The first is the collaboration between students. The second is role definition of the leader and student participation. The third is the perceived impact of the study groups.

Collaboration

Collaboration and cooperation between students was recorded throughout the sessions, and was discussed during conversations with the student leaders and advisors. The groups are designed to encourage student collaboration. I identified four types of collaboration through the observations and interviews. One type, or level, dealt with collective management of the group and the other three types represented levels of direct student interaction.

One type of collaboration was the collective effort of the students in the sessions to coordinate, direct, and manage the study sessions. This involved students suggesting activities, responding to suggestions from the leader, negotiating activities with the leader, and working towards a consensus on issues. Students collaborated by suggesting topics to be covered and methods to review and better understand material. Several of the students expressed satisfaction with this collaboration because gave them control over the way the group ran. Another interesting aspect of this collaboration was that students felt they were

working with other motivated students--it was a chance for "serious" students to get together.

Of the collaboration types that represented student interaction, the most tangible level was the actual sharing of materials, such as notes and textbooks, during the session. In one session, a student had incomplete notes, and several other students shared their notes to help. In another session students shared textbooks during an exercise.

A third level of cooperation was the sharing of knowledge between students. Students would answer other students' questions, add additional information to student leader explanations, and give examples relevant to the discussions. In the sociology class, several students would answer a student question without waiting for the leader to answer or redirect the question. Students said that this "thinking out loud" helped them clarify their own understanding while they had the opportunity to learn from other students. One student noted that "students can put things into terms I understand--at my level."

The fourth level of cooperation that emerged was the effort of students to support eachother through interpersonal interaction. There was support in terms of empathy and consensus (e.g., "I don't understand Erikson's theory either"). Other examples of this include one student commenting that another had a good point, or one saying they would use another student's idea while studying. There was support in terms of sharing views, often frustrations, about classes, instructors, and student life. There was non-academic support seen through discussions about families, significant others, or even the weather. Several students mentioned that this was one of their few chances to meet outside of class with other students, and talk about academic and non-academic life. I include the use of

humor in this level of cooperation. Jokes about the topic, the leader, the class and students themselves were used and often the whole group would react positively to a joke.

It seemed that these informal interactions contributed to the comfort level in the classes, and influenced student interaction throughout the session.

Discussions and comments about the professor and class crossed several types of collaboration. The students and leader in the session would often refer to the class and the instructor. During the sessions, the students and leader would discuss lectures, class notes, videos or other presentations in class, class assignments, and most of all, tests. The sessions provided a time for students to reflect, share concerns, clarify notes, ask questions, and gain insight into the teacher and tests through the leader and other students.

Testing was a main topic during the sessions. Concerns expressed in sessions included:

- questions about the content on tests ("e.g., will this be on the test?"
- the format of test questions (e.g., "would that be a multiple choice question?");
- sources of test questions (e.g., "he told us to focus on notes more than the book").

For all of the groups I observed, their classes were larger (35 or more students) lectures. The SI and SC sessions may be giving them time to clarify, and organize class information. Also, the sessions give them time to vent concerns and share concerns with other students.

The Leader Roles and Participation

The roles that were described for the student leaders and the type of student

participation seemed to be connected. I will first discuss the roles of the leaders and then discuss the participation patterns.

Leader as student, or leader as teacher? The role of the student leader was expressed through the behavior and interaction in the sessions, as well as through discussions about the role with the leaders, advisors, and students. In my initial discussions with program advisors and student leaders, and in my review of training materials, there was a clear definition of the role of the student leader as a model student--"not a teacher." Being a teacher would involve a more authoritarian, expert, presence in the group sessions. Although this was the initial message, there was a range of actual and perceived roles expressed in the subsequent observations and interviews. This section will address the roles assumed by, and ascribed to, the student leaders.

In looking at all the sources of data (observations, conversations and documents), there were different perspectives and different definitions of the leader role. The role of the leader (depending upon perspective, behavior, and the particular situation) can be described on a continuum. At one end of the continuum the leader was defined as a non-authority--a student. At the other end of the continuum, the leader was described as a authority--a teacher. In between, there are a range of role definitions including: role model, facilitator, tutor, expert in topic. The continuum, in a rough form, looks like the following:

Student	Role Model	Facilitator	Tutor	Expert	Teacher
Least amount of perceived expertise and authority					Highest amount of perceived expertise and authority

This continuum was developed by looking at leader-student interaction, management of sessions, discussions of class and teacher, and views of the leader role expressed by the leaders themselves and others. The continuum is useful in characterizing behaviors and perceptions of student leaders based upon level of expertise in topic and level of leader authority. It serves as a model or framework to help understand the role of the leader.

Leader behavior and perceptions on the student side of the continuum were characterized by:

- leaders referring to themselves and class as "us";
- leaders discussing their own coursework with students;
- leaders having a looser management of session in terms of setting agendas, and directing session in terms of pace and topic;
- leaders actually saying, "I am not here to teach" or "this isn't a class";
- students disagreeing with leader, or challenging leader;
- leaders empathizing with student complaints or concerns (e.g., "you're right, that doesn't seem fair);
- ambiguous insight into testing issues (e.g, I don't know what's on the test exactly);
- leaders giving fewer direct answers to student questions;
- leaders modeling study skill (e.g., saying "how I would study..." or "the way I remember the difference between those theories is...").

On the other side of the continuum, teaching end leader behavior and perception was

characterized by:

- leaders directing student behavior ("get out your notes");
- highly organized management of the session by the leader (e.g., materials, time management, agenda for session and upcoming sessions);
- leaders explaining the professor's perspective in response to student complaints;
- leaders directly answering questions or being expected to do so;
- giving direct insight into testing issues (e.g., tips on studying, advice on topics to study "the way you should study for the next quiz, or this is what you should study for the exam).

None of the student leaders I observed exhibited, or were described as, a pure teacher or a pure student leader. But, there were two leaders whom I considered to illustrate the two sides of the continuum.

Charles, the chemistry leader, exhibited more student sided characteristics. He sat on top of tables, rarely answered a question directly, often discussed his coursework with other students, asked students when they needed to meet again, and did not give the students directions often. That is, he let the students decide when to move on to another question, and often waited for volunteers for answers. The students in Charles class joked with him, giving him a hard time for being late for a session, and also challenged his answers.

Heather, the psychology leader, was more teaching oriented. She sat at a full desk in the front of the room and directed students to organize their smaller desks around her. She would answer questions directly, would tell the class they needed to "move on" to cover material, would direct students (e.g., open your textbooks to page...), and planned agendas for future sessions. The professor and other leaders even referred to Heather as a professional and a teacher. In Heather's class, humor was rarely directed at her, and her

expertise in the topic was rarely challenged by students.

Clearly, the behaviors and perceptions of student leaders do not fit the ideal of the student leader expressed in the training materials and by the leaders and advisors themselves. There are several possible explanations for the deviations. One is that there may be a need, or desire, for the student leader to be more authoritarian based upon their own comfort level. Tina, the History leader explained, "I have one student who is older than I am and he is constantly challenging me--I feel like I HAVE to know as much, or more than the students for them to take me seriously."

Students attending the study groups may contribute to the role definition through their own expectations and behaviors. As one student noted, "my group leader is better at teaching than my professor, that's why I go to the sessions--to learn." One session in particular illustrated the different expectations of the leader's role:

> Anne, the Sociology group leader, did not initiate her session one day. Instead, she sat at the front of the room with handouts laid out on a large desk. After several minutes, one of the students asked her, "Are you going to get started or what?" Anne replied, "I was waiting for you guys to get the ball rolling." Later in the session, Anne told them to pick up the handouts on the front of her desk. A student, apparently joking, said, "Why don't you hand them out?" Anne replied, "Because this ain't no class and I ain't no teacher, get the papers yourself.

Class participation. One of the goals of the study groups, expressed through the training materials, advisors, and student leaders is to encourage active participation of the students in the study groups. As one advisor put it, "The students should feel like they control the group and are responsible for how time is spent during the session."

The ideal of student participation is a clearly stated goal. Observations of the study

groups illustrated patterns of student participation that seemed to be associated with different leader behaviors.

Teaching oriented behaviors (as described above) occurred in conjunction with less student participation in terms of management of the session and contribution to the session. Also associated with teaching behavior was a limited amount of challenge to the leader's statements, answers or decisions. In contrast, Charles, who was less authoritarian was working through a chemistry equation with a student at the board. Several times during the process, Charles was corrected or challenged on his knowledge by other students in the session.

In sessions where the leader assigned the group an exercise to do outside of the session, the students accepted the assignment and only asked for clarification. In contrast, another leader suggested options for the planning of the next session, and told the students that they needed, as a group to decide what to do next. That leader told me, "the students know I am not going to plan everything for the group. At first they didn't like it, but now they might come up with ideas and suggestions."

Another student leader explained how she had to work on getting students to participate:

> It took a while for me to understand how to help students without giving them the answers right away. I think the biggest thing I learned was how to redirect questions so the other students get a chance to answer. I also encourage them to think through a question--I ask the group how they might go about finding the answer, and that works pretty well. There was one student who said that I never gave a straight answer because I probably didn't know the answer myself and that was awkward.

The degree and nature of student participation may be associated with the leader's behavior and expectations of the leader, but this should not indicate that the leader has planned for this, or is solely responsible for the level of participation. Student behavior and perceptions of students relates the overall level of student collaboration. For example, several leaders felt that some students resist the efforts of the leaders to encourage student participation, and that this may impact the leader's behavior and the overall atmosphere of the sessions.

In essence, there is a cycle of student participation based upon: leader behavior and expectations, student expectations and behavior, student activity, and positive feedback (for both the leaders and the students). This cycle, at its most effective, will increase student participation. Alternatively, if the points in the cycle do not encourage or reward student participation, the overall level of participation will be diminished. .

Even in situations where student leaders were more authoritarian, the students still participated and would contribute, but this was less obvious than in sessions with more student, non-authoritarian, leadership styles.

Perceived Impact of Groups

The impact of the study sessions cannot be quantified or causally related through this research. Rather, the perspectives on the impact give us insight into the ways that people make meaning of the sessions, and the potential impact of the sessions.

There were several major areas of impact that were identified by students, leaders, advisors, and faculty. These areas are: study skills; familiarity with course content;

comfort level with content; confidence in class and during assessment (e.g., tests); out-of-class involvement; and interest in study groups.

Advisors, students, and student leaders contend that the groups made students more aware of the concept of study skills and helped students develop skills.

> I know I wasn't doing everything as well as I could--in my classes--but I didn't know that I could improve. I thought that I just wasn't studying enough. Maybe I still need to study more, but I also think about the best way to study now. (Student in the sociology study group)

Several students and leaders noted that attending sessions refreshed class lectures and readings, as well as clarifying the course content. One leader explains, "I think that just coming to the sessions helps some people keep in touch with the topic. It reminds them that this is hard and they need to work on it...and I hope it helps them."

Another area of impact that was identified was student comfort and confidence. A student leader, described her experiences:

> I was a young widow with three kids and I realized I needed to go back to school. I knew that I was pretty good in high school, but that was about 15 years ago. Participating in the study groups helped my transition to college work and helped me gain the confidence I needed to succeed. Part of the reason I became a group leader was because I had gained so much from the study group I was in.

Rich, a student in the Psychology group explains his view of the groups:

> If you are really interested in doing well, why wouldn't you attend and get extra help? I think I do better on tests just knowing I went to the sessions before the test. Also, we get materials and do things we don't do in class.

The groups were also described as being an opportunity for students to become more involved with their community college experiences. One program advisor notes, "a lot of our students don't want to join a club or activity. If they are going to spend extra time on

campus--it's to do better in school. That's why a lot of them are here." The groups were described by another advisor as "justifiable involvement" meaning that many students do not feel that clubs and activities are part of the purpose of their going to school. Considering that many students work and have families at community colleges, the study groups offer this justifiable involvement.

During the sessions, there was a level of social involvement within sub-groups that most often formed around students of similar ages. Students would chat while waiting for a session to begin, as well as during and after sessions, about non-academic topics such as jobs, social events, and family issues. Two women in the Sociology group were discussing their sons' reactions to their studying. "My son loves telling me to study," said the first woman and the other woman identified with the experience noting that her son had started to tell her to "hit the books." Anne, the student leader for the group, later added that she likes talking with other women who, like herself, have children, work, and go to school. "They understand what you are going through more than anyone."

Several younger men from the Chemistry group used the time before the session (which met on Mondays) to discuss what they had done on their weekends and what they might do the next weekend.

In terms of student involvement, the student leaders, overall, felt that being a leader had been a positive experience.

Faculty and advisors also described the experience of being a leader as challenging and that most students "really grow from the experience." A program advisor noted, "There aren't many experiences like this on campus. We don't have many TAs and this is the closest

students come to getting teaching experience other than tutoring." All of the student leaders I met were either returning leaders, or were interested in being a leader again.

Finally, impact of the groups was expressed through continued interest in the groups and modeling of group activities. Currently, the SISC programs runs as many groups as it can afford. Professors have approached the program about establishing study groups and students have requested study groups be formed.

Students discussed the usefulness of study skills learned in the groups both within their course and in other courses. Some students have begun to form study groups after their experiences with SISC. One student I met had been in a History study group the previous year and was interested in a Spanish study group:

> I found the SC to be very helpful. Some of my friends and I are having a lot of trouble with Spanish, but there is no group offered. The SISC office has been helping us form a group on our own--giving us ideas and even some handouts....Right now the group is good, but I do a lot of the work.

Discussion

The themes that have emerged thus far in this project relate to two of the biggest issues concerning students in higher education--student involvement and active learning. The following section discusses the connections between the findings of this study and these concepts.

Involvement

A basic definition of involvement is the amount of energy that a student invests in his or her total experience. The concept of involvement has been linked to greater academic persistence, greater student outcomes, and overall educational attainment. To a certain extent, the greater a student's involvement on campus, the greater his or her satisfaction and success with college (Astin, 1984). Friedlander and MacDougall (1992) found similar positive effects concerning community college students.

An important element of student involvement is the amount of social interaction a student has with his or her peers (Tinto, 1987). Peer interaction and group formation is less frequent at the community college, and then contributes to lower levels of student involvement (Astin, 1993). Although the traditional views of peer groups may not exist at the community college, there is still group affiliation. The study groups each had a core of students who would attend regularly. The study groups have extended the opportunity for out-of-class experiences to a range of students. The students are brought together, voluntarily, through an common interest in their academic development and success.

Although the concept of involvement has proven to be a useful construct in exploring the experiences and outcomes of students, the common definition and use of involvement (and related terms such as integration) has its roots in the traditional four year institution with the traditional view of the college student. Using the traditional sense of the concept, community college students are often viewed to be less involved and receive fewer of the benefits of involvement (Astin, 1993).

At the traditional four year institution, student interest is more cohesive than at the typical community college. The range of programs and courses and the mission of

accessibility familiar to many community colleges creates a diverse environment. The students represent a diversity of backgrounds, goals, and interest. Based upon this, the idea of involvement may need to be expanded to truly explore involvement at the community college.

Tierney (1992) suggests that the common understanding of integration, may not be complete when it comes to understanding students from diverse or underrepresented groups. In the same way, the culture of the community college, and the diversity of the students, does not fit within a traditional four year model of integration and involvement. Rather, the community college may foster patterns of integration and involvement that best serves the students of a community college. The community college is under a press to serve a diverse group of students. The efforts of these institutions need to be looked at from two perspectives: 1) the potential for involvement for individuals and 2) the effectiveness of the college to serve a range of students under financial and organizational parameters.

By exploring student involvement and integration opportunities, such as the BCC study groups, we may be able to better understand the ways in which community colleges and their students initiate and enact patterns of student involvement.

The study groups at BCC represent a form of student involvement. There were strong patterns of collaboration, academic integration, and even social interaction evident in the sessions and in the way people discussed the groups. Continued examinations of such involvement, within the context of the community college, may lead to a more appropriate construction of involvement to be used in discussing community college students.

Along with different definitions of involvement, the study of community college

involvement may lead to the development of standards for involvement more appropriate for community colleges. All the students at the community college may not need, desire, or expect to be involved to the same degree. The study groups offered students an opportunity to become more involved without overwhelming the students. As the one advisor noted, non-traditional students view the study groups as justifiable involvement. This suggests that standards for involvement, and the impact of involvement, may need to be considered based on the characteristics and needs of individual students.

Active Learning

In the same way that student involvement has emerged as an important part of student success, active learning has emerged as an important aspect of student learning. Active learning involves students in the learning experience as active participants, as opposed to passive recipients of knowledge (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) . Active learning invests the student in the learning experience, fosters skill development, and supports greater learning outcomes.

The study groups illustrated a range of student participation that may relate to the level of authority and expertise that is projected on, or assumed by, a group leader. In the groups, greater involvement was associated with a less authoritarian group leader. It is also important to note that leader behavior that exhibited no authority or level of expertise frustrated students at times. Students also exhibited some discomfort with assuming authority during sessions. It appears that there needs to be a balance to encourage effective student participation. The effective use of authority, and the sharing of authority, is

necessary for effective active learning experiences. The balance of the authority and the student resistance to assuming authority are two issues pertinent to active learning (Davis, 1992; Hulse-Killacky, 1990).

The group sessions were often described as being a safe environment in which students could develop greater confidence. This may allow students to develop the skills and presence to become more active in their formal, often larger, classes. The students can develop and experiment with their own academic voices. This experimentation may lead to more confident and frequent participation in classes (Davis, 1992).

Conclusion

Studying the groups at BCC offers insight into a collaborative environment at a community college. There are implications for both further research and for practice.

In order to understand involvement from the community college perspective, we need to examine collaborative and integrative programs and environments from that perspective. Examining involvement from the community college perspective includes exploring: the student perspective; existing patterns of involvement; impact of involvement, faculty and administrative perspectives; and what factors may facilitate and challenge involvement. A concept of involvement grounded in the context of the community college may illustrate any differences from the traditional four year view of involvement. It may also lead to a more appropriate and useful definition of student involvement to be used in further studies of community college involvement, retention, and success.

The study groups illustrated patterns of active learning and indicate that the use of

authority and knowledge are important to understanding student participation. Continuing to examine the patterns of development (of groups and individuals) within groups may lead to further understanding of how students develop an active voice and how they transfer active learning skills and confidence to other academic settings, such as classes.

Continuing to explore the role of the group leader may lead to more insight on how group standards and norms for participation are developed and impact active learning. The use of authority and knowledge is perceived differently depending on the student and the group. Examining how students perceive and react to the use of authority and expertise in the groups may lead to greater insight into active learning and the facilitation of active learning.

The continued examination of these groups has implications for the practitioner as well. Understanding involvement in the diverse setting of the community college may lead to more effective programming and assessment of involvement on campus. Institutions will benefit from the study of patterns of involvement, student expectations of involvement, and the impact of involvement.

The study groups, and the individuals involved with the study groups, offer insight into involvement, particularly at the community college. By continuing to examine these types of environments, and developing a more comprehensive understanding of issues of integration and collaboration, the understanding of involvement will continue to develop.

The further study of involvement at community colleges will allow for the development of definitions and understanding of involvement that emerges from the context and culture of the community college. At this point, the themes presented in this paper

serve as a foundation for further study at BCC. This study will continue with further observations and more structured interviews, particularly with students, to refine, challenge, and develop the emerging themes. Questions that will drives this study in the future include: How are students expressing need for involvement and satisfaction with involvement? How are students structuring and interpreting collaboration, integration, and involvement? What are the ways in which students, faculty, and administrators at community colleges identify and assess the impact of student involvement? How is diversity managed and interpreted while facilitating collaborative experiences?

By exploring collaborative environments, and the perspectives on these environments, we can: learn about patterns of collaboration between students; examine what the role of facilitator means to students and the environment; and enhance our understanding of social and academic integration and students' involvement with their college experience. This understanding should contribute to efforts to help students persist and succeed in college. Exploring these topics within the context of the community college may lead to alternative views of involvement and lead to greater understanding of community college student success.

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